

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Around The World Stop

We will continue the story of Sir George Simpson's visit to Monterey in 1842 as it was published in a book in London under the title: "Authentic Narrative of a Journey Around the World." Sir George was an Englishman of the Hudson's Bay Company. Chapter twelve of the book deals almost entirely with his experiences in Monterey.

It was in 1842 — 124 years ago, that Sir George visited this coast and from this report published later he did not enjoy being in Monterey very much.

He wrote: "Next morning at 8 o'clock, we exchanged a salute of seven guns with the castle, which was at present so flush of gunpowder as to return our compliment without borrowing from us, as it sometimes condescends to do, the needful for the purpose; and soon afterward we were boarded by six officers of the customs, who flocked down to our vessels like vultures to their prey.

"As they came up the side of the ship, they exhibited a superabundance of bowing and smiling; and after the ordinary ceremonials were exchanged, they were conducted into the cabin in order to proceed to business.

"When told that we had paid our tonnage dues at San Francisco, and had no cargo to land at Monterey, they looked like a disappointed batch of expectant delegates, leaving the table on which wine was already placed, with dry lips and lengthening faces.

"To ourselves, however, the visit was by no means unwelcome, as a necessary preliminary to our going on shore, an operation which we effected by waiting on the under edge of the surf, till a comber, as it is technically distinguished, waited out a boat into a little cove at the foot of the Custom House and then one or two of the sailors, jumping out, dragged her up, so that when the waves retired, we were high and dry on shore.

"Though infinitely inferior as a port to San Francisco and San Diego, yet Monterey, from its central position, has always been the seat of government. It was, however, only after the revolution of 1836, that it could be compared with the other settlements in the point of commercial importance, after having suddenly

expanded from a few houses into a population of 700 souls."

Sir George goes on to describe Monterey as it appeared in 1842: "The town occupies a very pretty plain, which slopes toward the north and terminates to the southward in a tolerably lofty ridge.

"It is a mere collection of buildings, scattered as loose on the surface as if they were so many bullocks at pasture; so that the most expert surveyor could not possibly classify them into crooked streets. What a curious dictionary of circumlocutions a Monterey Directory would be! The dwellings, some of which attain the dignity of a second story, are built of adobe; being sheltered on every side from the sun by overhanging eaves, while toward the rainy quarter of southeast they enjoy the additional protection of boughs of trees resting like so many ladders on the roof.

"In order to resist the action of the elements, the walls, as I have already mentioned with respect to the mission in San Francisco, are remarkably thick, though this peculiarity is here partly intended to guard against the shock of earthquakes, which are so frequent that 120 of them were felt during two successive months of the last summer.

"This average, however, of two earthquakes a day is not so frightful as it looks. One shock being seldom severe, often, so slight, according to Basil Hall's experience in South America, as to escape the notice of a stranger."